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FM AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6750
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RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
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SUBJECT: TAJIKISTAN: POLITICAL PARTY ACTIVIST FREED FROM JAIL

REF: 05 DUSHANBE 1701

¶1. Social Democratic Party of Tajikistan (SDPT) activist and lawyer Fayzinoso Vohidova was released from prison February 21. On October 13 the Sughd regional prosecutor's charged Vohidova with "forgery and the production and sale of forged documents", "evading tax payments", and "causing damage by means of deception and breach of confidence". The prosecutor's office alleged Vohidova practiced law illegally using a false Moscow State University diploma. (REFTEL)

¶2. Embassy staff spoke to Vohidova February 22 who reported the court found her guilty of forgery for possessing a fake diploma, but dropped the other two charges. However, according to Tajik news reports, the Sughd court ruled that Vohidova is guilty of tax evasion, but dropped the other two charges. (COMMENT: The Tajik Press is not renowned for its accuracy. END COMMENT.)

¶3. The court decided Vohidova had served enough time during pretrial detention. According to Vohidova, as part of her punishment, she will not be able to occupy official positions or leadership roles for two years. She maintains her innocence and plans to appeal to a higher court.

¶4. COMMENT: Vohidova has been a vocal critic of the local Sughd government, particularly the prosecutor's office and was also a leading candidate during the February 2005 parliamentary elections, but was disqualified based on a technicality. The regional government is likely using her arrest and guilty verdict as an attempt to discredit her, the SDPT, and her civic advocacy. Prohibiting her from holding office and leadership positions show the arrest was politically motivated, particularly in a country where many are forced to buy their diplomas and documentation. END COMMENT.

WILSON